

Operation Lady Justice Virtual Tribal Consultation, Bureau of Indian Affairs Alaska Region (Second Session), September 14, 2020

MARY JO GIOVACCHINI: Good afternoon and welcome everyone to the Presidential Task Force on Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives Virtual Tribal Consultation for the BIA Alaska Region. I am with Leidos, contract support staff for the Task Force, and we are very pleased that you are here to join us today. Before we begin, I would like to go over a few items so that you know how to participate in today's event. All attendees are muted upon entry into the event. If you are planning to offer oral testimony, we ask that you ensure that you have completed the following steps. You are accessing the event via the Webex interface. In order to do this you will need to use a computer or a mobile device. When prompted, please enter your name the same way that you entered it when registering for the event. And you will have two options in which to join the audio portion. You may either have Webex call you or you can dial in. If you choose the option to dial in we ask that you please use your attendee ID number, this will allow us to be able to identify you and unmute you at that--the appropriate time. When you are called upon to offer your testimony, we will unmute your line and we will ask you to restate your name, whether you are a Tribal leader or a designee, and then you may begin with your testimony. There are no time limits for individuals that are Tribal leaders or designees, and all others will be limited to approximately seven to 10 minutes for their remarks.

There are also a few features that I would like to direct you to. If you hover over the bottom center portion of your screen you are going to see a series of radio buttons. We are going to use the radio button that looks like, with the three dots and one that looks like a conversation bubble. Today's event is being live captioned for individuals that are deaf or hard of hearing. If you need to use this feature please click on--excuse me, the Media Viewer and log in, and that will be located under the radio button with the three dots. If you are listening to the event using a computer and are having a difficult time hearing, please click on the Communicate Tab which is located at the top left of your screen and then Audio Connection to adjust your speakers. If you are still having a difficult time hearing, please select to use a telephone to dial in and you can find the phone number and a meeting invite information and your--sorry, and the event information in your meeting invite.

If you are having difficult time with anything during the event, please use the Chat Box and send your matter to the host of the event. And they will assist you. Any other matters that you want to address, please send them to all panelists. So, as a reminder, every line is muted and we will unmute you when it becomes your turn to speak. At this time, I would like to turn the consultation over to Katie Sullivan, Principal Deputy

Assistant Attorney General for the Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, who is one of the Co-Chairs for the Task Force and she will begin today's consultation.

KATIE SULLIVAN: Good afternoon everyone. I am so pleased to be here today. I run the Office of Justice Programs here at the Department of Justice, and Attorney General Bill Barr, who is Co-Chair of this Task Force along with Secretary David Bernhardt from the Department of the Interior, asked that I would be his represent--representative as a Co-Chair. And I have to say it has been the greatest privilege. This is an issue that I am extremely passionate about and this is one of the things that I get to do and have the opportunity--great privilege and opportunity to do, that I love so much in this job. So, I also want to let everyone know that Secretary Bernhardt has requested that Tara Sweeney, the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, represent him as Co-Chair of Operation Lady Justice. I have loved getting to know Tara and working with her, and I know that she is equally as passionate about not only these issues but coming up with solutions for those that are missing or murdered in India--in Indian Country.

So, before we begin today's consultation I would like to take a moment for silent prayer. I know that I typically just think and pray that we hear what we need to hear, that we as a Task Force are stellar at our job, at our trust responsibility, and that this government-to-government relationship does nothing but blossom and grow through this consultation and this Task Force. Thank you. We also have representation on the consultation today from all of the agencies who make up the Task Force, which include the Department of the Interior, Office of Justice Programs, the FBI, the Office on Violence Against Women, the BIA Office of Justice Services, and the Attorney General's Native America Issues Subcommittee, as well as the Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Native Americans. We are also very fortunate today to have representation from the White House. President Trump really championed this Executive Order and I have to say that the White House has been an incredible partner with the Task Force and keeping, you know, making sure in keeping us on track through the Domestic Policy Council and the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs. I would like to introduce Doug Hoelscher from the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs. Doug.

DOUG HOELSCHER: Great. Well, thank you very much Katie. I appreciate your and Tara's continued focus and leadership on this issue that as you mentioned, President Trump was the first President to formally elevate and shine a light on the issue of Missing and Murdered Alaska Natives and American Indians. On behalf of the President I want to welcome everybody to the call and thank you for devoting a portion of your day to join this important discussion. For most of the afternoon, as Katie mentioned, the floor will be yours. We are here to listen and learn from each of you speaking on behalf of

your personal experience in the communities that you help lead. We will take your experiences and suggestions into account as we continue to build out the federal government's efforts to address the issue of Missing and Murdered Native Americans, especially women and girls. Again, I want to just put out a little context, some background for what came before this series of virtual consultations, and I think by the end of the week or so we will be wrapping up the 12th regional consultation and really a commitment to make sure that we are listening and formally consulting with Tribal leaders and Native American community leaders.

In May of 2019 President Trump proclaimed Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives Awareness Day, becoming the first President to ever do so. Saying that "Ending the violence that disproportionately affects American Indian and Alaska Native communities is imperative." That order gave all the federal officials on this call our marching orders. We on the President's team spent the next few months thinking through and talking with Tribal communities about how to develop a program, a federal government action on this important issue. And last fall, just before Thanksgiving, the President hosted an Oval Office signing ceremony for an Executive Order establishing Operation Lady Justice, an interagency Task Force charged with developing an aggressive government-wide strategy to address the crisis of Missing and Murdered persons in Native American communities. This session today is part of the implementation program for that Order.

The President and his team are committed to following up on the Executive Order and providing real action and concrete progress. And you have seen over the last few months the beginnings of the formation of some Operation Lady Justice offices. In the last year you have seen prioritization of resources from the Department of Justice, financial resources, and personnel resources on this very important issue. And again we want to make progress, where we see strong consensus we are going to take action. And we are going to continue to learn from each of you as we complete this consultation process. But we have taken action and we look forward to taking further action to advance protocols, and processes, and personnel, and coordination, and collaboration at every level of government, federal, Tribal, state, and local.

And again we want to make sure that we underscore, we wish we would be in person with you all, but obviously with COVID presents some challenges there. But we did commit to these 12 regional consultations, formal consultations which are on top of, I think over a dozen listening sessions over the last year as well. So, again, underscoring our commitment to learn from you. We are really grateful to our partners at the Department of Justice and Department of the Interior and most importantly our Tribal partners, who work really hard to keep open lines of communication and keep moving

forward despite the unexpected turn this year has taken. And again, we are grateful for your presence and perspective for this virtual consultation. You have the commitment of the White House team, myself, and the Intergovernmental Affairs team, and our sister office, the Domestic Policy Council and Jennie Lichter and her team, that we will continue to drive progress with our agency partners to make a difference on this important issue and be informed by what we hear from you today. And with that I look forward to learning from you today and appreciate the chance to join you. Thank you.

KATIE SULLIVAN: Oh, Doug, thank you so much. So, we are going to get to it, listening to your testimony is obviously the point of today. The Task Force must consult with Tribes on the scope and nature of the issues regarding Missing or Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives. We have had a series of in-person consultations and listening sessions that were set from February to July across the country. We got through five in-person listening sessions in February and early March. And then the health crisis hit and then after really a tremendous amount of internal discussion and discussion with all of you, we decided to hold the consultation portion in this way, in this virtual way, as opposed to holding them in person.

So, we have 12 consult--we have had I think 11 consultations or 10 consultations, this is the 11th, we will be having 12. They are organized by BIA Region. The "Dear Tribal [Leader]" Letter and framing paper were distributed on July 17 and again on August 11. In addition, the series of virtual consultations have been widely publicized across the country. So you will see up on your screen, the consultation questions are organized across four areas to encourage discussion about issues in your communities: what is the scope of the two problems of missing or murdered, what challenges do your community or does your community face, what solutions or resources do you have or would like, and what specific recommendations do you have to address or curtail the incidents of missing persons or murdered cases within American Indian and Alaska Native communities? So that--this slide will remain up on the screen and help focus our discussion today. And with that I turn it back over to Leidos. Thank you.

MARY JO GIOVACCHINI: Thank you. We are going to start our testimony portion. As noted in the registration process, you must register to speak in order to participate in this consultation. If you wish to present testimony but have not registered, there is one additional consultation and that will be held Thursday, September 17, at 1:30 p.m. Eastern Time. Please register for that consultation so that you can be recognized to speak. We are now ready to hear from our Tribal leaders and designees who have registered to speak at today's session. There is no time limit for Tribal leaders or their designees to offer testimony. Our list of registered speakers is current as of 1:30 p.m. Eastern Time. If you registered after this time, we may not show your name as a

speaker but you will need to let us know. In order to do that, please submit a chat message to the host and all panelists, and then we will be able to acknowledge you.

We do have two Tribal leaders and designees who are on the phone and ready to speak. They are Denise Kinegak and Shirley Sam. Our first speaker is going to be Denise. Denise, we will unmute your line. After we do that, please indicate if you are a Tribal leader, a designee, re-state your name, and let us know the name of your Tribe. And Denise, I will let you know as soon as your line has been unmuted and give you a heads-up that you can go ahead and begin your testimony. Denise, your line is unmuted, please begin. Denise, are you able to hear us? We have unmuted your line and you may begin your testimony. All right Denise, we are going to mute your line back, we will come back to you though in a--in a bit and see if you are able to offer your testimony.

Our next speaker is going to be Shirley Sam. We are unable to identify Shirley. So we are going to mute or unmute a couple of the caller lines to see if one of those happens to be Shirley. So give us a moment to unmute those lines and then I will let you know when you can begin. All right. Shirley? We have unmuted the caller lines. If you are on the call, please re-state your name, whether you are a Tribal leader or designee, your Tribal--the name of your Tribe, and then you may begin testimony. Shirley Sam. All right. We are going to mute those lines again. I am going to go back to Denise. Denise, we are going to unmute your line. I will let you know when that is done and then you can offer your testimony. Denise Kinegak. Denise, your line is unmuted, go ahead and begin.

DENISE KINEGAK: Good morning, sorry, I do not know what was going on with my phone a minute ago. My name is Denise Kinegak, I work for Orutsararmiut Native Council in Bethel, Alaska. I am the Self-Governance Director. I guess a lot of our challenges that we face here are the limited law enforcement over a large land mass to cover. I have seen improvements and I think one of the areas I think that we are most concerned with is some of the--some of the, I guess, you could say nuances that we have seen with the sex trafficking and how that ties into the Missing and Murdered Native American women.

Currently internally, we have had a couple conversations regarding seeking funding and building capacity to educate young Tribal--young--yeah, young women and Tribal members, not just Tribe members but I guess the community as a whole and the region. I think the vulnerable population is being impacted through social media and, you know, with our limited technologies out here, I think it is something that we are continuously learning and finding creative ways in elevating those concerns. Some of the things that

we have discussed internally is we do have a good relationship with our local law enforcement but we would like to build a good partnership with the State of Alaska State Troopers as well as the other agencies that are involved such as the FBI.

I know that it is important to build those relationships and I guess you could say we are at the beginning phases of really addressing this. I think the current services that we do have, we do not really have very much to educate or prevent the vulnerable population. There is just not a lot of resources in rural Alaska and I think that there is a serious disconnect with urban and rural Alaska services, you know. I know that there is a high population in Anchorage of missing Alaska Native women that are typically, you know, in some way brought to Anchorage and that is where, you know, the crime or the incident happens which, you know, they become missing or murdered. And I think a lot of that we need to address that right here in our communities, we--it is discussed I think with our independent families but it--there is just not a lot of resources out there to really educate people in the rural communities of the dangers of the urban Alaska, you know, Fairbanks, Anchorage, Juneau area.

So I think that is where our tribe is at. I think what, you know, like I said, everything that we have discussed is us reaching out to the state and federal partners, and really gaining that good partnership as well as educating in our communities and finding the funding to that, you know, really does address our needs with how we educate our Tribal people in the rural communities. And I think our strength is how close we are to our Yup'ik value system and how we could use that as a mixture of, you know, education, you know. We have--we have a lot of resources internally, just not a lot that prepares people for the dangers of, you know, leaving our communities. And also there is just not a lot of resources to address domestic violence in the communities that maybe fit the needs of the Yup'ik people, not necessarily best practices that are, you know, expected to be used. And that is all I have to say for today, thank you.

MARY JO GIOVACCHINI: Thank you very much for your testimony. We have concluded with the Tribal leaders that have registered to offer testimony today and we are going to move on to the other individuals. The next person to speak is going to be Ingrid Cumberlandidge. Ingrid, we will unmute your line and please re-state your name as well as the name of your Tribe and then you can begin testimony, I will let you know when your line has been unmuted, give us one second please. I am sorry. We are having a little bit of a technical problem. My apologies, we are having a difficult time unmuting you, if you just give us a little bit more time and patience, we are going to try it again. Oh, Ingrid, I think you had recalled in under--again, sorry, we were trying to unmute the line that you were previously called in on, I apologize so give us one second here Ingrid, we will get to you. All right. For some reason, it is not letting us unmute you,

we will get back to you. We are going to go ahead and just move to the next person and see if we have any better luck, so give us one second. Our next presenter is going to be Billi Miller. Billi? We are going to try to unmute your line, please re-state your name, the name of your Tribe, and then you can begin your testimony. There, Billi, your line is unmuted, you may begin.

BILLI MILLER: Hi, my name is Billi Miller. I am originally enrolled in, I believe Teller Traditional, that is in Teller, Alaska, but I am not speaking on behalf as a designee or a Tribal leader. I was asked to present individually on behalf of Florence Okpealuk, who is actively an Indigenous woman that is missing. Today marks day 15 that she has been gone. Am I welcome to submit an individual testimony?

MARY JO GIOVACCHINI: I am sorry?

BILLI MILLER: Am I welcome to submit an individual testimony on behalf of myself, not on behalf of my organization or my company, my employment?

MARY JO GIOVACCHINI: Yes, I do believe so.

BILLI MILLER: Okay. So Florence Okpealuk, today is day 15 that she has been missing. She was reported missing on August 31. The locate person ad came out, I believe on August 31, it was around 8:06 p.m. This is a very interesting situation because law enforcement here in Nome, whether that is Nome Police Department or the troopers, a lot of Native people around here recognize the oppression that is set upon us. And then the lack of being inclusive, I should say. To put it--to put it bluntly, a lot of people here recognize it in a way that when Florence had gone missing, the process had moved so slowly. But if she were a white woman, everything would have moved really quickly for that search. An example of that is Florence Okpealuk was last seen on West Beach. That is supposedly outside of Nome Police Department's jurisdiction. Within maybe a couple hundred feet, I would say. But then this past spring when we had three OCS workers, they were all Caucasian women, they went missing on the Nome-Teller Highway. Nome Police Department has zoomed out there multiple vehicles in search for them and retrieved them. This is very common in our area.

What is--so with Florence Okpealuk missing, they actually waited until day six to do a community-wide search for her. And a part of this is there is a stereotype around Native women, Indigenous women. Our images are skewed because of oppression, you know, certain identities like alcohol--or alcoholism, things of that matter, we are dirty. So the importance of our lives is unjustly minimized. And so with Florence, you know, things got really, really uncomfortable while searching for her. We have never encountered

issues with law enforcement this way. We have never encountered interruptions with searching for a human being. She went missing on--she was reported missing on August 31. And by this time, a bunch of women within the community had already organized their own searches. And this looked like women going out, women babysitting each other's children, women providing food. We had a few men in the group, that was really wonderful. We have searched town, we looked in abandoned junkyards, abandoned cars, abandoned buildings, we searched the tundra. We had done the entire sea wall from east to west. We are submitting all of our pictures of everything we found. Come September 3, I believe this is day four, I made a call to City Management and I said, "Is there an organized search for Florence Okpealuk?" And I was told "No, there is not an organized search for Florence Okpealuk. That is not a real thing. You know, the land is so vast out there." And at that point we felt hopeless.

During that day, we actually saw Nome volunteer fire department. We saw four men come out, that was great. And this day, they said the police were finally starting their investigation at West Beach where Florence was last seen. Now here in our town--the town is so small, everybody knows everybody except there are--there are gold miners that come in from out of town. They are very drug-affiliated, they rape our women, they assault our women, they trash our land, they are very--not all of them, but a lot of them show this type of behavior and lifestyle. So this was our concern was that Florence Okpealuk was seen on a couch sitting outside of the primary suspect's tent, with no shoes, no socks, no jacket, no phone.

She was--you know, by this time, the Nome Police Department, they are moving so slowly, so our people took it upon ourselves to act quickly, to search, to try to find out where she was. There had been oral testimonies given from the gold miners on West Beach, saying that they had seen the suspect and her driving down on a four-wheeler, she never came back, she went up the tundra. We actually--some of our group members found bare footprints on the tundra in the direction that they had gone. Now this is where it gets really strange. There was--their footprints were very small--she is very small, she is five-foot-two, roughly 130 pounds, she is 33 years old. And then there are large men's shoeprints up there. So day five comes, it is 7:13 p.m., that was when the footprints were found. We called it into the Nome Police Department. I was separated from the group.

But we always make sure to record everything at this point because we do not trust law enforcement here. It has always been that way, they have done a lot of hurtful things to our people. And so we do not trust them, so we are getting everything recorded. Now 7:13, we report that there are footprints, and there are shoeprints in the mud. And by 8:38 p.m., I circle back to our group and I say, "Where is the Nome Police Department?"

Are they coming?" "Oh, I do not know. They have not showed up and they have not--they have not been around. They have not called us back." So I called Angel Mendez with Nome Police Dispatcher. She is known--her dad is known to be very drug-affiliated and gang-affiliated here in Nome. She is the dispatcher that night, and I said, "Hi, we have bare footprints out here right past dredge six. Who is coming out? Flo has been missing for five days now. We do not want this evidence tampered with. You need to come out now." And she said, "We never received a phone call from you guys." And I said, "No, you did. There have been multiple people standing around this phone on speakerphone listening to you take the call and it is online. We need you to come out."

And she put me on hold and then she said--and this is--these words are words we have heard throughout the entire search for Florence. "I am sorry, that is out of our jurisdiction. We are not going to search for her there." And I told her, "By law, you are a mandated reporter. Did you pass this up to the trooper?" She did not. There are multiple women standing around my phone, we heard her say over and over, "I am going to hang up on you. I am going to hang up on you." And I said, "No, you are not. You are not going to hang up on me until I know that you have passed this information up. This is important. Florence is missing. We need this evidence recorded." So, you know, I had to press her to have her report it. Now this is where it gets really sad. We are told there is no trooper on duty. And we said, "Okay, we have got evidence. Linked--possibly-linked to Florence's case." They sent me to Unalakleet, Alaska, a trooper there. And he said--this was Trooper McFee. He said, "Whoa, somebody is missing? I have never heard of that there. Florence Okpealuk? I have not heard the name." And he and I had to push and push and push to get a trooper to come out to the crime--or to that scene, which is now--I believe it is a crime scene now. We had Aileen Witrowsky come out.

And this is where our people started to have major trust issues with the troopers and the Nome Police Department. There are bare footprints out there, and a large men's shoe size. She came out with an empty can to spray the footprints and it was empty. She sprayed and said, "Oh, empty." She left the bottle there. There is a tarp out there that looks like it has blood on it, it is construction tarp. She just picked it up, took a picture, and left it. And then in some of the footprints, there is a rubber band, a woman's earring, that was also left. The next day we went out there after the community line sweep, we saw all of this evidence still there. And we had to force Nome Police Department to come out and pick it up.

We have also been working with the chief search and rescue. He gave us a couple of points like he had said John's phone dinged at Council 22, that is 22 miles out of town right around Safety, there is a bridge there. So we immediately took a group out the next day to search these lines. Now right before--I organized a daisy line sweep on the

left side of the road maybe half a mile, past 23. We stepped over the road, came back. Right before mile 23, there were fresh car tracks and men's underwear, fresh men's underwear. What we did know about John was that he rented a car the day after Florence went missing. He never rents a car. Ever. That is what we were told. And so I passed this information up. I am passing all this information along for all of my organized search and rescue efforts.

And what happens a little later is my name is slandered, my powerful Native female voice is being retracted from published articles, and then we see in the paper all of our efforts being taken over by search and rescue, police department. They did say that we have had investigators out here since day one. That is not true. We have been in--we have been kept in touch with and we have known since day one when FBI were coming out. So these are false statements being made publicly. And then it just gets really weird on out with NPD (Nome Police Department). We have actually been out there searching for Flo. We have had a lot of--we have had a lot of trucks with out-of-town men following us with unregistered license plates. They will go off into the distance and shoot guns. This is where I say we have never been interrupted in a search and rescue effort. And so we had reasons to believe that they were trying to stop us from finding something about Flo. And what gets really weird is when we organize these search and rescue efforts, we do not tell anybody but in a closed group where we are going. Somehow they always knew exactly where we were going before we got there. And I had one person I was trusting with all of our information that I was passing up, that was an official.

It is just things like that, really weird occurrences, really uncomfortable. And then we had our second community line sweep. What is really sad is on day six, we knew--so we found the footprints on day five. On day six, we said her footprints are right up there, keep pushing forward within 100 feet, you will see them. And maybe the community can keep pushing to find her, time is precious, it is vital, she could be out there. No, what did they do? They stop us at the pump house and they turn us right in a completely different direction.

And so there are a lot of things that we are not understanding within the officials here. Yeah, I can go on and on, I have got so many pictures. We stopped--we have been out searching for Flo effortlessly for 12 hours a day. And then when we see suspicious behavior, we pull out our cameras and we record. We have seen things like gold miners moving their property, which is fine, that is fine. But when you are a suspect and you are having other people move your belongings and we pull our camera out because you are moving things very discreetly underneath a tarp, that is strange. So we called NPD (Nome Police Department). He came out and he--he came and he talked to us. And

while he is talking to us, the suspect starts walking away on the tundra. And then we said, "Okay, there is your guy, he is walking off." And he goes back. He has a second phone, now we are very observant. I have been very, very careful with all of our work. We did know that his first phone was confiscated. When this whole incident happened at the tundra, he was talking on his second phone, and he threw his backpack, he was really upset. The police officer went and he patted him down, he put him in the car. He did not check his bag, he put him in his police car, and he did not care to check the trailer.

We said we have reason to believe that that might be linked to Flo. You should check under the tarp, he did not. And then the next day, gold miners are still moving their property from that beach. This is where Flo went missing by the way, keep that in mind. What they are doing now is they have got a built-in camper trailer on the back of a gray truck, it is like a blue-gray truck. And they have put black tarp over the camper, they blacked out the windows, so when we are out looking for Flo and we see this, we call the cops and say we have reason to suspect that Florence Okpealuk might be in that camper. No. What is--and police--I mean, the Nome Police Department do? They meet us out there and they tell us, "I am more likely to arrest you for stalking at this point." And we said, "Please check the camper." They did not.

MARY JO GIOVACCHINI: Hi, I am sorry, Billi, I am going to have to ask you to wrap it up. You are at the 10-minute mark. So if you just want to say some final closing?

BILLI MILLER: Yeah. So there is just a lot of suspicion out here. It is really uncomfortable, it is really discouraging. Native people are doing a lot of hard work to find Flo and we are being discredited. And now we have all these things coming out, how the officials are working really hard with us when we actually recorded a lot of dismissal behavior, things like that. And it is day 15, she is not found, we have a bunch of clues, they did not take them in. Yeah.

MARY JO GIOVACCHINI: Thank you, Billi, very much. We appreciate your testimony. Our next presenter or speaker is going to be Eileen Arnold. Eileen, if you would please restate your name, as well as the name of your Tribe. As a reminder, you do have approximately seven to 10 minutes to offer testimony. We are going to unmute your line, Eileen. I will let you know when that has been done. Okay. Your line is unmuted. You may begin giving your testimony.

EILEEN ARNOLD: Hi, this is Eileen Arnold and I am not—I am not a member of a tribe, but I live in Bethel, Alaska, where I am the Executive Director of the Victim Services,

one of three victim--well, one of three shelters in the YK Delta region of Western Alaska. I was invited to this, am I able to give testimony even though I am not a tribal member?

MARY JO GIOVACCHINI: Yes, you are. Thank you.

EILEEN ARNOLD: Okay. Well, I just need to echo what I have heard already from the people who have been testifying. There is not enough law enforcement, especially for this region of Western Alaska, which Bethel and Nome are sort of lumped together in the--in the same, like, Western Alaska region. The--I could--I could give a lot of separate examples of when women, you know, sought law enforcement intervention and were not able to get it. And that sometimes necessitated our agency, our staff calling law enforcement to get a response, like, for instance, recently, a person in the community who I knew texted me and said a woman had reported to the troopers sexual assault from when she was a child. And it was, like, less than 10 years ago, and that she had been told by the troopers that the statute of limitations had passed. I still have not looked up if that statute even exists, but I was very doubtful about it. I called our local troopers and asked them to run, you know--or--and asked them why they had screened this out for investigation. 'Cause the person that she alleged abuse against is still in the community. And I was told that her name was not even in their records, so I find it hard to believe that she did not report. I do think it is possible that her name was not put into the system, just as an effort to, you know, not follow up on a case that might be, you know, very old.

And I have a lot of compassion for the--how many cases there are out here, and I know that that probably contributes to some of them being screened out, that there is no-- simply not enough law enforcements or district attorneys, I would say, or investigators for district attorneys to adequately address the number of interpersonal violence cases we have against women and children in this region. I have heard also on the--on the topic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous women, we had a woman in our shelter who believed that she had information concerning a very old case. And she came to shelter because she was afraid for her life and reported to both our local law enforcement and troopers, and I believe was, you know, abruptly told that they are getting false reports all the time and that there was nothing to this, and nothing went forward. And, you know, I understand that it--that her concerns and what she wanted to tell the troopers might not be linked to an actual case, but I am concerned that an interview was not even conducted because, like, what else do you have to go on for cold cases, and sort of similar to, you know, what happened in--what is happening in Nome. You know, this woman had evidence that could be followed up on if it was quickly followed up on, and the opportunity for that was just, you know, was not taken at all. So, you know, I suspect that that case is just going to remain closed and cold.

I do not know what the reasoning is behind why some of these cases are not addressed. Again, I do think that it is not enough troopers in a very large region. And also the two on, two off that--I understand, like, staffing patterns, like, sometimes to fill positions, you can only get people to agree to like a two-week on, two-week off, but that really stalls investigations, we see it all the time. And that really stalls, you know "the justice system." And it is very disheartening for us at our victim services agency and for the people that we are trying to assist.

I think one really good thing that is happening is a lot of money for victim services in Western Alaska. I--we see more and more local communities starting victim advocacy and I think that that is excellent, and I hope that that money is sustained and not just like a five-year thing because it takes time to develop victim services programs, it takes time to develop that comfort. And also it just inevitably takes time to work through whatever trauma people have experienced in those communities because inevitably, it is, you know, survivors who often go into this work because they understand how important it is. And I just want to make sure that the federal funding that has come through is sustained for a long period of time because it takes a long period of time to establish a program and to establish confidence, and in services provided.

But otherwise, that is the--that is the gist of what we need to say as a--as a regional shelter, you know, we will bring people from the different village communities that, you know, are in the YK Delta region. You know, we are certainly not able to meet all of the demand, like, when people call in the middle of the night, there is, you know, there is no plane flying in the middle of the night. There needs to be--there needs to be local law enforcement so that there can be accountability and safety, there needs to be a local victim services program so that people have a place to go in the middle of the night, and there, you know, there just needs to be a network for that so that we can handle the need that exists out here. And thank you for allowing me the space to speak.

MARY JO GIOVACCHINI: Thank you very much for your testimony. Ingrid Cumberlidge, we are going to go back to you, if you are still here as caller number four. We are going to unmute that line. Please restate your name, as well as the name of your Tribe, and then you can begin your testimony. Ingrid, your line has been unmuted, go ahead and begin.

INGRID CUMBERLIDGE: Hello. This is Ingrid Cumberlidge, can you hear me?

MARY JO GIOVACCHINI: Yes, we can.

INGRID CUMBERLIDGE: Okay. My Tribe is Qagan Tayagungin Tribe of Sand Point. I am the Senior Murdered Indigenous Person Coordinator here in the District of Alaska, housed in the United States Attorney's Office in Anchorage. And I came to this position with a lot of concerns in things that had happened in our community. We had--we had both young men and young women come into the city and disappear, and not have good results, and it has been just a struggle. As a college student years ago, I had roommates that disappeared and some were found with good results and some were not. So this is--this has been going on for many, many years. I have family that has been working on it for many, many years. And what I--what I am mostly here to say to the people that are on the--on the consultation today is that the MMIP [Missing and Murdered Indigenous person] position is working and as a part of that, we have an Alaska worker that has--that started this last week and that is one of the solutions. That will not be an immediate solution, but it—it is a good place for us to start, and I just want to take a moment and talk a little bit about that.

That includes state law enforcement or Alaska State Troopers. It includes the municipal law enforcement. It is a limited group so that we can have some good discussions, but our goal is to encourage everybody to contribute to it. It has VPSOs [Village Public Safety Officers] represented, tribal representation, and our federal partners are FBI, our Coast Guard, our U.S. Attorney's Office, our U.S. Marshals are all a part of--part of this group. In the initial meeting, we talked about what was going on with the federal protocols and how we could make them our Alaska guides and protocols. But more than that, we talked about what is going on in our communities, and the fact that there is no law enforcement in so many of our communities. And that those communities with law enforcement sometimes have very limited law enforcement, are limited in training, want more training and more ongoing training. And then in our hubs, how many of our Native people are being displaced in our hubs and the services that they need with that.

And so the goal is really to develop some community crisis plans and working with communities. So when and if it happens we can respond in communities in all three of those categories without law enforcement--with limited law enforcement and in our community hubs. And if anybody would like to contribute to those discussions, they can certainly contribute through me at my email, which is ingrid.cumberlidge@usdoj.gov. And Cumberlidge is just like it sounds in spelling. You can certainly find me on the web as well. But our hope is that through these discussions and this community response, we can improve the relationship with our law enforcement who is so dedicated to their job, and we can also include--increase the access to resources in these incidences and the outreach and coordination between agencies. And we have already seen that started to--starting to happen. Those people that are representing our Tribes in our

victim services have brought a good voice to this discussion and I know they would welcome your input.

We are hoping that we can--that we will be allowed to do a virtual session at Alaska Federation of Natives and you will have the opportunity to contribute and get all the contact information through that event. And so I just wanted to take a moment and tell you that there is work going on. And we recognize the concerns. My background, I am a Tribal member of the Qagan Tayagungin Tribe of Sand Point and I am both Tlingit and Aleut and have family throughout the state. And I also am a Tribal court judge of over 20 years and an educator of over 20 years. So I am bringing a lot into this and I am learning every single day, but I am certainly willing to listen to your concerns and to help in any way that I can. And I am going to stop there.

MARY JO GIOVACCHINI: Thank you so much for your testimony. We are actually going to go back to one of the Tribal leaders that has recently joined. Shirley Sam, you are going to be the next person to present your testimony. Please indicate if you are a Tribal leader or a Tribal designee, the name of your Tribe, and then I will let you know when your line has been unmuted. Please bear with us. Give us a second. All right, Shirley, I am sorry, we are just having a little bit of difficulty here. We are going to unmute your line.

SHIRLEY SAM: Yes. Hey, now.

MARY JO GIOVACCHINI: Shirley, is that you?

SHIRLEY SAM: Yes.

MARY JO GIOVACCHINI: Shirley Sam? I think we can mute the call-in lines again.

SHIRLEY SAM: Yes.

MARY JO GIOVACCHINI: Michelle, please. All right, Shirley Sam, your line has been unmuted. You can go ahead and begin your testimony. Again, just please restate your name as well as whether or not you are a Tribal leader or a designee, and the name of your Tribe. As a leader or designee you are not--you do not have a time limit, thank you so much. Shirley, you may begin. Your line has been unmuted. Shirley, if your telephone is muted, you are going to have to unmute your telephone or your computer or mobile device, whatever it is you are calling in on. Shirley, are you able to hear us? All right. At this time, I am not sure what is going on. Shirley, your line is unmuted. We can go ahead and--that would be our last presenter, our last speaker for the day.

Shirley, if you would like, you could join the--Thursday's consultation which begins at the same time, 1:30 Eastern Time. You can go ahead and register for that and indicate that you would like to offer testimony and then we can take you at that time.

KATIE SULLIVAN: And this is Katie, I was not sure if Shirley could type a question in to see if she can identify what the issue is and we might be able to resolve it.

MARY JO GIOVACCHINI: Yes. We--I will be glad to do that and actually she did, let us see. She said she can hear us but we cannot hear her. All right. We are going to try one other thing. Shirley, we are going to unmute the caller lines again just to see if there is some conflict there. So we are going to unmute caller line 20 and 22. And Shirley, let us see here, I apologize for the silence. Shirley, do you want to go ahead and try again and see if we can hear you? All the lines have been unmuted, Shirley. And Shirley, I sent you a message in the Q&A. I am not sure if you are calling in on a computer. If you are, that could be--the computer could be set up, your line might be--your headset is working where you can hear things but you are not able to speak. You would need to go to the top menu bar and then click on the Communicate tab and then Audio Connection. And then you could actually select and say "use computer for audio" if that has not already been done or you can also switch audio and you could have WebEx call you. Shirley, are you able to hear us or--I did send you messages in the Q&A, I am not sure if you are receiving those. All right. All right. I did get a response back from Shirley. She is going to register and give her testimony on Thursday so, Katie, that would--this would be the last of our speakers for today.

KATIE SULLIVAN: Thank you. And just a couple of--first of all, thanks to everyone who provided testimony today. Your stories and your experiences are so important for us to hear, especially the--so that we can see where there is a consistency and gaps in either services or responses. We are a, you know, we are a policy Task Force, that is we are trying to come up with policies and protocols to address these specific cases. And--or to address all cases, the specific ones we are hearing about as well as the ones going forward. Your stories are obviously heart-wrenching and just elevate the reason why we are doing what we are doing and why we all on the Task Force, the White House, Department of Justice, HHS (Health and Human Services), and Department of the Interior are so committed to doing better in this area for you, our Tribal partners.

I also just want to say that I was in Bethel and I know that with the Attorney General, when we did our Alaska trip a little over a year ago, was able to see some of the victim services, visited the domestic violence shelter that also has a children's advocacy center. I am just so glad to hear from you and your community, so thank you so much. And thank you to everybody. This is vital for us to get this right. The Operation Lady

Justice does have a website and an email address, are list--they are listed on the slide that is in front of you now. If you would like to receive regular updates from Operation Lady Justice, please subscribe to the website. We are also receiving written comments through September 30 of 2020. They can be sent to the Operation Lady Justice website. And please, we would love your feedback. If the consultation or this forum does not work for you or you missed it in some way, please submit your written testimony. And just thank you to everyone on the Task Force, to the White House, Doug, as well as to everyone who called in today, and all of our friends and partners in Indian Country, thank you very much. Have a wonderful afternoon.

MARY JO GIOVACCHINI: This concludes today's consultation.